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JOHN DOWNING OF FAIRFIELDS, NORTHUMBER-
LAND COUNTY, VIRGINIA, AND HIS
DESCENDANTS

By MRS. O. A. KEACH, Wichita, Kansas

1. John² Downing, the second son of Captain William¹ Downing, "of Great Wicomico River, planter,"* is first mentioned in the records of Northumberland County, January 27, 1668, when he and his brother, William, were deeded land by their father and which is described as "600 acres of land up the north side of horse-path bounding east upon William Wildy and west upon Richard Nelms."

Captain William¹ Downing had five sons and two daughters: (1) William,² who left no male issue; (2) John,² (3) Thomas,² who left one son, Thomas,³ who died without issue; (4) George,² died unmarried; (5) Charles,² who died unmarried; (6) Mary,² probably married Jonathan Royston, and had an only child, Mary,³ who married Charles Betts; (7) Patience,² married *first*, ante 1695, Daniel Neale (issue: Nathan³ Neale); *second*, John Graham (and as Mrs. Patience Graham brought suit in behalf of her son Nathan Neale); *third*, William Coppedge (issue: John³ Coppedge, born January 31, 1710).

Thus it would seem that John,² the second son of Captain William¹ Downing was the progenitor of all that name in Northumberland County.

In 1679, John² Downing was granted a certificate for 100 acres of land for two headrights, *Charles Blackwell* and Margaret Harley. On January 16, 1684, he added 350 acres to his holdings

* See "The Downings of Northumberland County," in WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY, Vol. XXIV, p. 189, in which article Mrs. Keach gives the record of Captain William Downing and some account of the descendants of his daughters.

for seven headrights. May 21, 1679, he was appointed constable for Fairfields parish.

On October 19, 1681, the Court appointed John² Downing guardian to John Cockrill, son of Andrew Cockrill. This association of names continues for more than a hundred years and it is possible that John² Downing may have married the widow of Andrew Cockrill. June 8, 1684, Mr. John² Downing and William Tignal (Tignor) were church-wardens of Fairfields parish. August 15, 1688, John² Downing and Thomas Hobson Jr. are mentioned as overseers of the will of Mr. William¹ Downing, Senior. John² Downing was a member of the House of Burgesses in 1693, was a Justice of the Peace in 1694 and succeeding years. In May, 1695, his half brother, Charles,² chose Mr. John² Downing his guardian.

The will of Mr. John² Downing was proved May 18, 1698, by the oaths of David Spence, Thomas Hobson and John Simpkin. Mrs. Elizabeth Downing, his widow, was his executrix. She was the second wife of John² Downing and later, as guardian of her son, John Downing, brought suit in his behalf against Susannah Franklin, relict of John Hughlett, and John Hughlett, Jr., probably for her son's maternal inheritance. Captain Richard Haynie was Mrs. Downing's attorney and represented her in the courts at various times.

The will of Mrs. Elizabeth Downing (relict of Mr. John² Downing) was presented in court October 15, 1715, by her executor, Mr. Thomas Hughlett.

It is believed Mr. John² Downing had issue:*

2. i. Sarah³ Downing married, *first*, John Span; *second*, David Spence.
3. ii. Samuel³ Downing married Elizabeth Saunders.
4. iii. John³ Downing married Elizabeth _____.
- iv. (Possibly) Ann³ Downing.

* Except in the case of his youngest son, John,³ the only direct identification of the children of John Downing in the Northumberland County records seems to be that of his daughter, Sarah,³ who must have been among his older children.

2. Sarah³ Downing (*John*,² *William*¹) married *first*, John Span (son of Richard and Gracianna Span); *second*, David Spence.†

† The records of the Spence family are very fragmentary. It is an honorable Scotch name of considerable historical importance. In Northumberland County, the Spences and Pickerings were associated from the time of the second large immigration into that county.

Feb. 4, 1666. George Pickering, planter, and Sarah, his wife, made a deed to David Spence for a tract of land in Northumberland County—towards the head of the Lower Chetank Creeke—being part of a patent granted to said Pickering February 4, 1662.

Oct. 28, 1665. Assignment of land from David Spence to John Graham.

1665, Nov. 21. Deed of gift from David Spence to John Alexander, son of William Alexander, for one heifer.

Capt. *Alexander* Spence was sheriff, and otherwise prominent in Westmoreland County, and died about 1712.

In an abstract from Richmond County, dated February 6, 1694, it is stated that Alexander Spence married Elizabeth, the youngest daughter of Evan Browne and that James Taylor, late of Richmond county, but now of Westmoreland County, married the widow of Evan Browne (WILLIAM AND MARY QUARTERLY).

Patrick Spence lived probably in Lancaster County. On May 27, 1712, Hon. Robert Carter of Lanc. County petitioned the Northumberland County Court in behalf of Mary Spence. In this record it is stated that Capt. George Eskridge of Westmoreland County, was one of the executors of Patrick Spence, deceased, and guardian to Mary Spence, sister of said Patrick and daughter of Alexander Spence, and that Mr. Richard Neale of Northumberland County and Mr. Matthew Mason of Maryland married the other two daughters of said Alexander Spence, now both deceased.

1704, July 20, Susannah Mason of the Province of Maryland vs. Phil. Rogers (*Northumberland Co. Records*).

There was also a John Spence who married Jemima Waddy, daughter of Mr. Thomas Waddy of Wicomico parish.

Was David Spence who gave the deed of gift to John Alexander in 1665, the father of: (1) Alexander Spence who married Elizabeth Browne; (2) David Spence who married 1st, Sarah Downing, 2nd, Ann Edwards; (3) John Spence who married Jemima Waddy?

My first record of the second David Spence is November 16, 1692, when Mr. John Downing was awarded an attachment against the estate of John James, a part of which was in the hands of David Spence.

On May 18, 1698, the will of Mr. John Downing was proved by the oath of David Spence, one of the witnesses.

On May 19, 1697, Sarah³ Span, widow and relict of John Span, decd., was granted a commission of administration upon the estate of her deceased husband and February 17, 1698, Sarah Span was granted administration upon the estate of her deceased daughter, Elizabeth Span.

Sarah³ (Downing) Span, widow of John Span, probably married David Spence in 1698, before her father's death, as on August 18, 1699, David Spence and Sarah, his wife, legatee of John² Downing, deceased, brought suit against Mrs. Elizabeth Downing, executrix of Mr. John Downing. September 23, 1699. judgment was granted David Spence and Sarah, his wife, legatee of Mr. John² Downing vs. Mrs. Elizabeth Downing, his executrix, and said Elizabeth Downing in her qualification as executrix was ordered to pay over the amount due. August 23, 1700, John Reason was arrested at the suite of David Spence and Sarah, his wife, late Sarah Span, widow, and judgment was granted for 12 pounds sterling and two thousand pounds tobacco.

Sarah³ Spence died before July 17, 1711, as on that date David Spence and Ann (Edwards) his wife, petitioned for Ann's estate.

David Spence's will, dated February 23, 1726, was proved April 20, 1726.

John and Sarah³ (Downing) Span, had issue :

- i. Elizabeth⁴ Span, on whose estate administration was granted to her mother, Mrs. Sarah Spann February 17, 1698.

He was probably at this time the husband of Sarah Downing, daughter of Mr. John Downing. They lived in Newman's Neck, as he was appointed surveyor of the highways there in 1700.

David Spence appears often in the county records, in several law suits, as grand juror, as appraiser of estates, and on May 19, 1708, he was appointed constable for Newman's Neck "in room of Williams Nelms." This was an office of dignity and held by men of the best standing in the community. David Spence added to his plantation by purchase in 1710 and 1724. His wife, Sarah, died probably in 1710 and he married again in 1711, Ann Edwards, widow. His will was dated February 23, 1726, and was probated April 20, 1726.

David and Sarah³ (Downing-Spann) Spence, had issue, (mentioned in David Spence's will) :

ii. Sarah⁴ Spence married William Pickering, of Northumberland County, issue: (a) Sarah⁵ Pickering, born December 18, 1718; (b) William⁵ Pickering, born November 24, 1720; (c) Ann⁵ Pickering, born December 28, 1722; (d) David⁵ Pickering, born February 2, 1725. (These names from S. F. Stephen's Parish Register); (e) Laurenah⁵ Pickering (her name obtained from Northumberland County Records).

On May 7, 1748, David Pickering of St. Stephen's Parish, the grandson of David Spence, sold to Moseley Mott, part of a tract land described as follows: "granted by patent to William Cornish December 9, 1662, and by him sold to Samuel Nicholls April 30, 1673, from Nichols to Downing, from Downing to Spence, from Spence to Wm. Pickering, from Pickering to David Pickering, first party to this present deed."

iii. Ann⁴ Spence, married about 1720, Sylvester Welch, Jr., of Northumberland County. The will of Sylvester Welch, dated June 13, 1753, proved February 11, 1754, names wife Ann, son Benjamin, pistol, holster and sword; sons John and Sylvester; daughters Sarah and Ann; Executors, wife Ann and son Benjamin. Witnesses, Thomas Cotrell and David Pickering. Sylvester and Ann⁴ (Spence) Welch, had issue: (a) Winifred⁵ Welch, born August 22, 1721; (b) Benjamin⁵ Welch, born January 1, 1723; (c) John⁵ Welch, born August 17, 1727; (d) Silvester⁵ Welch, born October 1, 1729; (e) Daniel⁵ Welch, born February 18, 1732; (f) Laurenah⁵ Welch, born December 6, 1733; (g) Nancy⁵ Welch, born October 18, 1740 (these names and dates are from St. Stephen's Parish Register); (h) Ann⁵ Welch; (i) Sarah⁵ Welch (named in their father's will).

The Pickerings and Welches were substantial and well known families and furnished several soldiers to the Revolutionary Army.

iv. John⁴ Spence, d. unm. and April 19, 1727, Sylvester Welch (husband of Ann [Spence] Welch), presented an inventory of the estate of John Spence, deceased, his brother-in-law.

3. Samuel³ Downing (*John*,² *William*¹). It will be remembered that Captain William¹ Downing on January 27, 1668; deeded six hundred acres of land to his sons William² and John,² described as "up the north side of the horse-path and bounding east on Richard Nelms." This land was situated in Fairfield's parish and Mr. John² Downing made many additions to its acres by purchase

and by patent from the proprietors of the Northern Neck. The "horse-path" became the "horse-head" and is so known to the present time. By inter-marriage the "horse-head plantation" passed into the hands of the Nelms family who were, even in 1668, neighbors of the Downings.

The will of Mr. John² Downing is missing but as Samuel³ was seated upon the horsepath land in Fairfield's parish, he was no doubt the eldest son.

Samuel Downing married Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. Ebenezer Saunders. In 1711, April 2, upon the motion of Samuel Downing and Elizabeth, his wife, daughter of Mr. Ebenezer Saunders, deceased, a commission was appointed to divide the estate and lay off 100 acres left by will to the said Elizabeth.

Samuel Downing's will is also missing but it was presented by his widow October 19, 1715, and proved by the oaths of Joseph Typton and Elizabeth Cockrill.*

Samuel³ and Elizabeth (Saunders) Downing had issue:

5. i. William⁴ Downing married Winifred Nelms.
6. ii. Samuel⁴ Downing married Elizabeth Dameron.
- iii. Elizabeth⁴ Downing married William Nelms. In 1736

William and Samuel Downing assigned their share of negroes to their sister Elizabeth wife of William Nelms

4. John³ Downing (*John*,² *William*¹). He was the youngest son of his parents, John² and Elizabeth Downing, and was a minor in 1698 at the time of his father's death.

In 1709, July 20, Anne Lyon, wife of John Lyon, and executrix of Hugh Callon, petitioned the Court to appoint Mr. John Downing, Charles Nelms and David Spence to appraise the said Callon's

* The widow, Elizabeth (Saunders) Downing, married Charles Nelms and on May 17, 1716, they petitioned the court to appoint appraisers for the estate of Samuel Downing.

On July 17, 1717, Mr. Chas. Nelms and Mrs. Elizabeth Downing confessed judgment to Mr. Joseph Typton for personal estate made over to said Typton by his deceased mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Typton by deed of gift.

May 20, 1724. Charles Nelms was by the court appointed overseer of the highways from "Horsehead" to Dunoway's old field. This plantation known as "Horsehead" has remained in the Nelms family until within the last generation.

estate. Anne Lyon may have been a sister of Mr. John Downing, and sister-in-law of David Spence who married a daughter of Mr. John Downing, Sr.

Feb. 16, 1716, the will of John³ Downing was presented by Elizabeth Downing, one of the executors. Witnesses, Joseph Typton and William Harding. (Margaret Downing, the widow of Captain William¹ Downing had married about 1683 Mr. Edward Typton.)

March 19, 1718, Judgment was granted Elizabeth Downing, executrix of John³ Downing against the estate of Samuel³ Downing (Samuel and John Downing were brothers) and the Court ordered that Samuel Nelms and wife, Elizabeth (relict of Samuel Downing) pay same.

The will of John³ Downing is missing but very careful study of the records seems to prove that John³ Downing and Elizabeth, his wife, had issue:

7. i. John⁴ Downing married Hannah Fallin.
8. ii. Edward⁴ Downing married Frances Nutt.
9. iii. David⁴ Downing.
10. iv. Charles⁴ Downing.
- v. Possibly a daughter.

5. William⁴ Downing (*Samuel³ John² William¹*), the eldest son of Samuel³ and Elizabeth (Saunders) Downing, was probably of age about March 17, 1726, as on that date he petitioned the Court for his part of his father's estate. In 1736 William⁴ and Samuel⁴ Downing assigned their share of negroes to their sister Elizabeth Nelms, the wife of William Nelms.

William⁴ Downing married Winifred Nelms.

The will of William⁴ Downing, dated June 9, 1741 and proved November 9, 1741, names his wife, Winifred, sons Samuel and William, and appoints wife, Winifred, and father in law, Samuel Nelms, executors.

William⁴ and Winifred (Nelms) Downing, had issue, (so far as is known):

11. i. Samuel⁵ Downing, born July 2, 1728 (St. Stephen's Parish Register); died *circa* 1751; married Winifred Dameron.
12. ii. William⁵ Downing, born ———, died 1783; married Sarah Cockrill.

6. Samuel⁴ Downing (*Samuel*,³ *John*,² *William*¹), known as Samuel Downing, Senior (to distinguish him from his nephew, Samuel,⁵ son of William⁴ and Winifred [Nelms] Downing), and the younger son of Samuel³ and Elizabeth (Saunders) Downing, became the progenitor of a notable and distinguished branch of this Northumberland County family. On March 17, 1726, he chose his stepfather, Charles Nelms, his guardian. The will of Charles Nelms, proved September 19, 1733, named William Nelms, Samuel Nelms and Samuel Downing as executors.

Samuel⁴ Downing, Senior, married, about 1742, Elizabeth Dameron, daughter of Mr. Thomas Dameron and Katherine Hughlett, his wife. Elizabeth (Dameron) Downing* is mentioned in the will of her father, Thomas Dameron, dated April 17, 1751 proved May 10, 1751.

By the death of her brother, Thomas Dameron, Jr., Elizabeth Downing had inherited a considerable estate which had been left to them by the will of their grandfather, Thomas Hughlett. She did not marry a second time, but in the interests of her estates appears many times in the court records.

The will of Samuel⁴ Downing, dated April 17, 1757, was proved May 10, 1757: to son Samuel, land given me by my father Samuel Downing; to son John, land I bought of Hugh Kelly and Samuel Nelms, Jr.; to daughter Betty; to son Thomas, the negroes that fell to me by the death of Mr. Thomas Dameron; wife Elizabeth and Mr. Samuel Blackwell executors and guardian of my children.

* April 16, 1771, an indenture between Elizabeth Downing of St. Stephen's parish, of the one part, Thomas Downing, son of the said Elizabeth of the second part, and John Downing, son of the said Elizabeth of the third part and Betty Downing, daughter of the aforesaid Elizabeth of the fourth part, doth by these presents bargain, sell and give to her son, Thomas Downing all of said lands, negroes, goods and all other estate which descended to her upon the death of her brother, Thomas Dameron . . . Deeds of gifts to her son John and daughter, Elizabeth. This indenture further witnesseth that Thomas Downing doth grant and confirm to his brother, John Downing all . . . the estate which fell to said Thomas by the death of Samuel Downing, brother to said Thomas."

Samuel⁴ and Elizabeth (Dameron) Downing, had issue:

13. i. Thomas⁵ Downing, born May 23, 1744, died November 14, 1799, married Sarah Ann Rogers.
- ii. Samuel⁵ Downing,* m. Oct. 2, 1765, Mary Robertson, dau. Dr. Robertson of Lancaster Co.
- iii. Betty⁵ Downing.
14. iv. John⁵ Downing, born May 1, 1755, married Elizabeth Nutt.

7. John⁴ Downing (*John*,³ *John*,² *William*¹). John⁴ Downing, son of John³ and Elizabeth Downing, appears in the court records in 1733 when on May 16 he brought suit against the estate of Richard Dudley, in the hands of Richard Smith and others. He was also a grand jurymen November 9, 1739. On November 9, 1743, Hannah, orphan of Edward⁴ Downing, chose (her uncle) John⁴ Downing, her guardian. August 4, 1748 he was executor of Samuel Snow and on November 9 presented an inventory of the estate of Joseph Bridgman. The appraisers of the Bridgman estate were William Blundell, Samuel Downing and Samuel Nelms. March 30, 1752, John Downing and Hannah, his wife, of Fairfield's Parish, conveyed by deed to Elizabeth Nelms, Jr., 25½ acres of land adjoining the land of Samuel Downing and Samuel Nelms. September 8, 1755, a deed from Peter Bearcroft to John Downing. February 14, 1763, a deed from Thomas Wornum to John Downing, of St. Stephen's Parish. July, 1773,

* The few items gleaned from the records about Samuel⁵ Downing mentioned in the preceding paragraph will be set out here instead of later.

An inventory of his estate was presented to the court on April 10, 1769, and Mary, widow of Samuel Downing was possessed with her dower in said Samuel's estate in the hands of Thomas Downing. On the 13th of December following, Mary, the widow of Samuel, gave a deed to Thomas Downing for her right of dower in land and the grist mill left her by her decd. husband "who died sometime in May, 1768." It is probable that Mary Downing married Robert Henning as at the same time, she released her dower, Thomas Downing of St. Stephen's parish gave a negro girl to Robert Henning, of Wicomico parish which after the death of the said Henning was to return to Thomas Dameron.

It is evident that Samuel Downing left no issue. His twin sister Betty died unmarried. Her brothers very scrupulously deeded her property to provide her an independent living.

a deed from William Wornum and Elizabeth, his wife, to Charles Downing. March 11, 1776, John Downing and Hannah, his wife, conveyed by deed, land to their son Charles Downing. July 8, 1782, John Downing, of Northumberland County, deeded land to his son, Edward Downing, and on the same date there is a deed of gift of negroes from John Downing, Sr., to his son, John Downing, Jr. June 11, 1786, appears Captain John Downing, an officer of militia.

October 14, 1793, the inventory of John Downing, deceased.

John⁴ Downing married Hannah, daughter of Charles Fallin* and had issue:

15. i. Charles⁵ Downing, born July 4, 1738.
- ii. Elizabeth⁵ Downing, born April 9, 1740.
- iii. Hannah⁵ Downing, born April 19, 174—; married ——

Shearman.

- iv. Nancy⁵ Downing, born January 20, 174—; died unmarried.†

16. v. Edward⁵ Downing, born April 22, 1750.

vi. Sarah⁵ Downing, born February 18, 1753; married John B. Kenner.

17. vii. John⁵ Downing.

8. Edward⁴ Downing (*John*,³ *John*,² *William*¹), son of John³ and Elizabeth Downing, died before 1739. He married, prior to 1734, Frances Nutt.

On June 12, 1739, Richard Smith and others were appointed to settle the accounts of Edward Downing's estate and to allot to the widow, Frances, her part of the same. Frances (Nutt) Downing married secondly, William Haynie, son of Captain Richard Haynie. On December 14, 1741, William Haynie, guardian of

* The will of Charles Fallon, dated January 23, 1753, proved June 8, 1752 [sic] mentions daughter Hannah Downing and grandson Charles Downing. The will of Charles Fallin, dated February 11, 1773, proved October 11, 1773, names brother in law, John Downing and sister, Hannah Downing. Charles Downing was one of the executors of the last mentioned will.

† The will of Nancy Downing, dated April 28, 1814, proved December 12, 1815, mentions sisters Hannah Shearman and Sarah Kenner; brother John Downing; brother in law John B Kenner; niece Elizabeth Kenner; nephew John Downing.

Hannah⁵ Downing, orphan of Edward⁴ Downing, petitions for her part of Charles Downing's estate in the hands of John Downing.*

Edward⁴ Downing had children:

- i. Elizabeth⁵ Downing, born June 20, 1731 (who must have died in infancy).
- ii. Hannah⁵ Downing, born December 11, 1733.

9. David⁴ Downing (*John,³ John,² William¹*). It is believed that David was the third son of John and Elizabeth Downing. He was probably named for David Spence, the husband of his aunt, Sarah (Downing) Spence. On April 19, 1733, Thomas Edwards moved the Court in behalf of the orphans of John Bell to appoint a commission consisting of Joseph Graham, John Shapleigh and Thomas Gill to audit the accounts and set apart so much of the estate of David Downing of sufficient value to satisfy orphans and put it in the hands of William Hobson. On the same date, an attachment was granted Matthew Kenner against the estate of David Downing. Nothing more is known of David Downing. He probably married the widow of John Bell and may have left young children.

10. Charles⁴ Downing (*John,³ John,² William¹*). Charles, probably the youngest son of John and Elizabeth Downing seems to have died unmarried. On December 14, 1741, Wm. Haynie, guardian of Hannah Downing orphan of Edward, petitioned the Court for her part of Charles Downing's estate in the hands of John Downing.

A record bearing date February 6, 1789, recites that Wm. Wildy, Jr., gave a deed to Charles Downing (son of Capt. John Downing) for 90 acres in St. Stephen's parish, part of a tract sold by Charles Downing, deceased to Mottley Wildy, deceased, by deed bearing date October 6, 1739.

(To be Concluded.)

* On August 11, 1742, Mrs. Fallin, grandmother of Hannah Downing was refused guardianship of the child "because the Court is informed that one of Mrs. Fallin's daughters is married to the petitioner, John Downing who is heir at law on the part of the father of said Hannah, who is only daughter and heir of Edward Downing, deceased." Spencer Ball was appointed guardian to Hannah Downing at this time, but she later chose her uncle, John Downing for her guardian.